

SYNDESMOS *News*

Syndesmos News – Year 2004 / Issue 1

Editorial

After a long period of silence, here is the new issue of Syndesmos News, the newsletter of our Fellowship. We would like to greet all members, friends and partners of Syndesmos. Last year we had our general Assembly in Durres, Albania (14th – 22nd July 2003), which gave a renewed impulse to

the Fellowship, with strong guidelines: Syndesmos is called to work on the issue of Orthodox unity and Church witness. We were hosted in the Theological Academy by the Orthodox Church of Albania and its dynamic youth movement "Sons of Light" (affiliated member of Syndesmos). There we met participants from all over the world sharing the same faith and bearing common concerns for the Church of Christ, we welcomed former Syndesmos officers who inspired us



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for our work today, and we were addressed by His Beatitude Anastasios, Archbishop of Tirana and Primate of the Autocephalous Church of Albania who set alight within us a missionary flame and the awareness of the apostolic dimension of Orthodoxy. In our gathering in Albania we experienced the truth of the Psalm: "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity" (Psalm 132 [133], 1). You will find more details on the XVIIth General Assembly in the article on page 5, by Alexandra Popescu.

The newly elected Board of administration met in Piraeus (Greece) for the first time after the general Assembly in October 2003, and appointed a previous member of the Board, Olga Oleinik, to the position of secretary general. Under her guidance, the General Secretariat is implementing projects in accordance with the recommendations of the general Assembly. It is a common characteristic of youth activities and movements that there is a frequent turnover in staff and participants: youth ministry – and this applies to Syndesmos – means constant renewal and changes. And

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The World Fellowship **SYNDESMOS** of Orthodox Youth

"Endeavoring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond (syndesmos) of peace" Ephesians 4:3

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Syndesmos is the World Fellowship of Orthodox Youth. The aim of Syndesmos is to develop cooperation and communication among Orthodox Youth movements and theological schools around the world and to promote within them a deeper understanding and vision of their common faith. Founded in 1953, Syndesmos counts 121 member movements in 42 countries and organizes meetings, festivals, and exchanges. Syndesmos publishes resource materials, reports, directories, books a newsletter and a website.

Syndesmos relies entirely on grants and donations to finance its projects. Donations may be sent in Euro, USD or other fully convertible currency to the Syndesmos General Secretariat or directly to the Syndesmos bank account: Eurobank-Ergasias, Dyrachiou 62, Athens 10443, Greece, Account No. 0026-0323-61-0100325865 (EURO), 0026-0323-69-1100006676 (USD).
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"Syndesmos News"

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News and Notes

• **23 May 2004** former Syndesmos president, Hildo Bos, was ordained to deaconate by His Eminence Archbishop Simon of Belgium and the Netherlands (Patriarchate of Russia). Many years!

• **Memory eternal!**

It is with great sorrow that we were informed about the early departure to the Lord of His Divine Beatitude Peter VII, Patriarch of Alexandria and Exarch of Africa. H.B. Peter VII had been in collaboration with our Fellowship since 2002. He blessed warmly our last event in Cameroon (2002-2003). After this event, he encouraged us to continue further contacts with Orthodox groups in Africa. We pray the Lord to rest his soul in the tabernacle of the righteous; and we will insure his successor, H.B. Theodore II, of our service to the Church of the Great City of Alexandria and all Africa.



• *Theodore (Horeftakis)*, the Cretan-born head of the Orthodox Church in Zimbabwe, has been elected as the new Patriarch of Alexandria by the Holy Synod, becoming leader of hundreds of thousands of Orthodox Africans.

• The Conference of European Churches (CEC) opened search for a new General Secretary. For further information, please, visit www.cec-kek.org or contact Syndesmos General Secretariat.

• The World Council of Churches (WCC) will hold its next Conference on World Mission and Evangelism "COME HOLY SPIRIT, HEAL AND RECONCILE! Called in Christ to be reconciling and healing communities" in Greece, 9 – 16 May. Details at www.mission2005.org.

Syndesmos representation in 2004

• Europe, Youth and Globalisation Event organised by the Directorate of Youth and Sport of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg, France, from **5 – 9 May**, *Dariusz Zdanuk (Poland)*

• Christian forum "Together for Europe", Stuttgart, Germany, **8 May** *Nathan Hoppe (Albania), Christopher D'Aloisio (Belgium), Lydia Obolensky-D'Aloisio (Belgium), Outi Vasko (Finland), Teemu Toivonen (Finland), Fr. Heikki Huttunen (Finland), Cyrille Sollogoub (France), Olga Oleinik (Greece), Tony El Soury (Lebanon)*

• CEC consultation on ecumenical formation in Europe, Geneva, Switzerland, **14-15 June**, *Olga Oleinik (Greece)*

• The 11th Annual General Assembly of the Interparliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy, Kiev, Ukraine, **24-27 June 2004**, *Spyros Tsimouris (Greece)*

• WCC seminar "Mission and Youth in the Context of Globalisation", Bossey, Switzerland, **16-21 August**, *Marieta Ganeva (Bulgaria)*

• Religions and Cultures: the Courage to Forge a New Spiritual Humanism, meeting organized by the Community of St. Egidio, Milano, Italy, **5-7 September**, *Christopher D'Aloisio (Belgium)*

• Twelfth International Ecumenical Conference on Orthodox Spirituality, the Monastery of Bose, Italy, **12 – 18 September**, *Spyros Tsimouris (Greece)*

• CEC Church and Society Commission Meeting with European Commission's Directorate on Education and Culture, Brussels, **24 September**, *Christopher D'Aloisio (Belgium)*

• CEC Central Committee Meeting, Prague, Czech Republic, **27 September – 03 October**, *Christopher D'Aloisio (Belgium)*

yet, Syndesmos also places itself in a continuity of spirit: in that respect, we thank all our predecessors in the Syndesmos office for their support and their confidence, especially Manos Koumbarelis, Hildo Bos and Rebecca Hookway. We insure them that we will continue the work along the lines they have initiated in the General Secretariat since it has moved to Athens and we ask for their support in our future activities.

Following the call to unity and witness of the Church expressed by Syndesmos members in Durres, Albania, the board identified as a matter of urgency to work on sensitive ecclesial topics which are not necessarily dealt with by other Church organs.

Through our activities, we want to serve the Church in her mission in the world, taking advantage of the enthusiasm that is proper to youth. Our motto could be: "to address important issues in the Church with daring and respect."

During the quadriennium to come, Syndesmos will organise some short-term activities and some follow-up programmes. Within these programmes, our work will be centred on four important fields:

- missionary work and the apostolic dimension of Orthodoxy
- "Towards the Council... Urgent issues in the Church"
- ecumenism and understanding of other religions
- relations with non-Chalcedonian Churches

In some of these areas, work has already begun. We are taking part as participants, observers or partners in many ecumenical meetings, to insure a serious Orthodox youth representation and to give a substantial input in ecumenical dialogue, thanks to the rich experience of our many members throughout the world (see page 4 the contribution of Fr. Heikki Huttunen, [former Syndesmos President] and Outi Vasko [member of the Board, Northern Europe Regional Representative], at the ecumenical meeting "Together for Europe" in Stuttgart, 8th May 2004).

One project has already taken place in a concrete ecumenical field: in June 2004, Spyros Tsimouris (vice-President) and Rebecca Hookway (former Secretary-general) lead a team of Orthodox youth to the ecumenical Monastery of Bose (Italy), in a fruitful encounter with a group of Roman-Catholic youth (See page 12 for a more detailed report on this event).

In July, a double group gathered around Dimitri Oikonomou (former President), Spyros Tsimouris (vice-President) and Nikos Polyzos (member of the Board, Southern Europe Regional Representative) for the beginning of the Diaconia camps on Mount Athos (Philotheou Monastery) for the men, and in the Monastery of Saint John the Forerunner in Ayia (Volos, Greece). This was an appropriate moment to understand how monastic tradition is bringing together ascetic life and ecological consciousness. Syndesmos has been involved for many years in the process of raising this concern about ecology: since its inauguration, the world day of prayer for Creation (1st September) has been included in the annual Syndesmos calendar, and a resource book has been published by the Fellowship in 1996, edited by Dr Dimitri Oikonomou (then President) and Alexander Belopopsky (former Secretary-general) on "Orthodoxy and Ecology". Let everything that has breath praise the Lord...

In August 2004, the Board of administration gathered again, this time in a meeting open to other participants, under the audacious title "Towards the Council... Urgent issues in the Church". We were

hosted by ACER-MJO, a founding member of Syndesmos, in the French Alps. We discussed what should be done concerning conciliarity in Orthodoxy to facilitate the process of preparation of the Great Council, awaited since the beginning of the past century! It was an inspiring meeting for the Board, whose members also had the opportunity – the first time for some – to participate in a non-administrative Syndesmos event. You will read the communiqué of this meeting on page 13 as well as a call to all active forces in the Church for a new service of consultation towards the Great Council of our Church.

Some weeks ago, two important Syndesmos events took place: one in Estonia and one in Russia (see the reports in the next issue of "Syndesmos News"). In Estonia, a newly entered country in the European Union, participants shared their views on the Christian understanding of citizenship. The project was organised by Syndesmos, with the support of European Youth Foundation, in collaboration with local youth movements among which are the Fellowship of Orthodox Youth in Estonia (Autonomous Church of Estonia) and the Estonian Orthodox Youth League (Diocese of Estonia of the Moscow Patriarchate), both now being members of Syndesmos.

The project in Russia has a specific character since it is the first in our four-year plan on Mission and apostolic awareness; it took place in a modern missionary field, Russia, where decades of communism have damaged the Church and have created the need to re-evangelise a country where the Church used to be so strong and lively. This re-evangelisation is already in process, and is implemented in a new historical way. The challenges of mission in all post-communist societies are not only challenges of delivering the Gospel but also of discerning what is essential and what is not in our Orthodox ethos and tradition in the twenty-first century.

All the issues mentioned above, and many others, spring from the needs of our Church today. Syndesmos can be one place where they can be discussed freely, with respect and without fear. We understand our role in the Fellowship as facilitators, supports and guarantors of this freedom. However, nothing can be done in the Body of Christ without the blessing of the ones who bear the pastoral responsibility, the local bishops. That is why we need to meet them during our events, and visit the primates of the Churches, in order to receive not only their blessings, but also their advice on Church life, and to provide for them the echo of the people's consciousness worldwide. Such visits need time and support, both moral and financial – since Syndesmos has no permanent sources of income.

In 2005, amongst the events taking place in different regions of the world, we will try to implement projects in Africa and Asia, and continue our four-year programmes. More information will come soon on our website and through our newsletter.

In all our service in Syndesmos, we constantly bear in mind that we are serving the Orthodox Church in humility and with all our weaknesses, but with the assurance that by serving the Church, we are serving ourselves to be more integrated in the Body of Christ, in order to be closer to Him who is our Saviour. We try to become together an existential Bond of unity, a "syndesmos".

Christopher D'Aloisio, president.

Message from secretary general



Brothers and sisters in Christ!

It is my great honor to greet you on the pages of "Syndesmos News". Syndesmos has become a part of my life in 1999 and since then the significance of being involved in the Fellowship grew steadily and finally brought me to the decision to

apply for the position of secretary general.

I would like to share with you a few points, which I consider to be very characteristic of Syndesmos and of vital importance for further flourishing of the Fellowship:

- *Syndesmos is a place and a tool for actualization of the gifts of the Holy Spirit given to the youth of the Orthodox Church. It was born out of the desire to serve the Church and through many years it continued to accumulate the energy of numerous devoted servants of the Church.*

- *In order to allow these gifts to grow and bring fruit there should be an environment of love and freedom.*
- *Everything we do should be based on the living Tradition of the Church.*
- *Syndesmos is called for service in the neglected areas of the church life with humbleness and respect.*
- *The main aspirations of Syndesmos are Orthodox unity, deep and substantial dialogue with other Christians, actualization of the royal priesthood of the people of God, and proclaiming the Good News to the world.*

I invite everyone for closer contacts, discussions, common work and prayer. May the Lord guide us in serving His Church!

In Christ,

*Olga Oleinik
Syndesmos secretary general*

Christian forum "Together for Europe"

Stuttgart, Germany, 8 May



Fr. Heikki and Outi during their presentation



The participants of the Forum "Together for Europe"

More than 10000 Christians of all denominations, most of them members of lay church movements and communities, gathered in Stuttgart (Germany) on the 8th of May 2004 to witness their Christian faith as Europeans and reaffirm their commitment to be visible and active as well as to promote peace and unity in the newly enlarged Europe. The event was organised by various Christian organisations and communities, but no Orthodox organisation took part in the preparatory work, probably because there are not many international organisations in the Orthodox Church.

However, the Orthodox Church was represented in the audience by several Orthodox, mainly church hierarchs of various jurisdictions, and by a Syndesmos delegation of 9 people from Albania, Belgium, Greece, Finland, France, and Lebanon. One of the few moments when the voice of the Orthodox was heard is when Father Heikki Huttunen (Finland, former president of Syndesmos) and Outi Vasko (Finland, member of Syndesmos Board of Administration, Northern Europe regional representative) were invited to speak in plenary, for 2 minutes and 57 seconds (!). Their contribution was broadcasted simultaneously to approximately 100 000 persons that had gathered for the day in several towns of Europe and were following the event on giant screens. The text of this contribution is given here in full length. *More on this event at www.europ2004.org.*



Syndesmos representatives with the organisers of the meeting

"The Charisma of Orthodox youth" (ONL Finland)

Fr. Heikki Huttunen and Ms. Outi Vasko

The Orthodox Church has a history of 1,000 year in the Eastern province of Finland, called Kareljia.

As a result of the Second World War, Finland lost almost all of its traditionally Orthodox area in Kareljia. Most of 80.000 Orthodox became refugees. Many Orthodox Youth movements began in a spontaneous and miraculous way during and right after the Second World War.

The service of the Orthodox Youth Movement in Finland eventually became decisive for the Church in its struggle for survival. The Youth Movement had a key role in helping to gather together the Orthodox for divine services, study groups, camps and to form Eucharistic Communities, which eventually became new parishes throughout the country.

The Church became the main focus of the life and service of the Youth Movement. The evangelical renewal of the life of the Church was initiated

in many ways by the Orthodox Youth Movement. Joy and enthusiasm about liturgical life was expressed in what was described as "sanctifying time".

This liturgical renewal was accompanied by an interest in the ascetic writings of the Fathers and the Mothers of the Desert – it was an invitation to spirituality of love for goodness and beauty. It was also a discovery of the universality of the Orthodox Christian Faith. The small Orthodox minority of Finland was not alone in the world.

Through contacts within Syndesmos – The World Fellowship of 121 Orthodox Youth Movements – we discovered our fraternity in Christ. It strengthened our identity and gave us, a minority, the possibility of becoming involved ecumenically. We realized that what is a challenge for one Church is also for others, and what is a blessing for one Church is a blessing for the others too.

Knowing the roots – moving further: Syndesmos celebrates its 50th anniversary

The XVII Syndesmos General Assembly in Albania seen by a German participant

This was not the first time I participated in a Syndesmos event: a previous event, comparable in dimensions to the General Assembly, was the Syndesmos Festival in France, in which I took part in 2001 – a meeting full of inspiration for me and for other German participants. But in coming to Albania as a delegate of my youth organisation, the Orthodox youth fellowship in Germany (OJB), I must say, I didn't expect the same kind of experience. I knew the last general assemblies were awkward in some ways, because the problems and conflicts our Church faces at the moment were reflected in these general assemblies much more than in other meetings, and because elections in such a context unfortunately presuppose a kind of struggle for influence. I also knew that general assemblies were large gatherings, too vast to allow the participants to get to know other fellow Orthodox and to feel like a real 'bond of unity' – a fact I appreciated so much in other Syndesmos meetings.

These low expectations were contradicted: the assembly was, for me, as inspiring and strengthening as the other events I knew, and in some ways even more so: it was something to think back to with joy and gratitude – perhaps for a lifetime – and presented a new source of ideas and energy for our work in Germany. I had the impression that real goals were once again in focus.

One could see the organisers had put much effort in finding ways to make this Jubilee Assembly first of all a real spiritual experience. Many small discussion groups and workshops on various subjects gave participants a good opportunity to get to know each other; the subjects of these workshops were important issues but not polemical ones. For example, Syndesmos activities since the last general assembly were described and discussed; there were discussions and talks on different aspects of mission; every day there was a bible study and, like in all Syndesmos meetings, services held in many languages. The number of participants was reduced – one instead of two from every youth movement – which facilitated communication; even the idea for the cultural evening of forming non-national groups was of much help. But perhaps most important of all, the assembly put emphasis on the essence of Syndesmos, by means of returning to its sources. This was done by inviting some of the former Syndesmos officers to speak to us about the past – not in a nostalgic, 'good old times' way, but in a constructive one. Their interventions were given in parallel with

contributions from younger Syndesmos workers, a fact that contributed to making us understand their importance for today.

The selected venue for this assembly was inspiring in itself; Albania is a former communist country, where the Church had been completely eradicated and had to be rebuilt from zero – and thus it is a mission country, which, in spite of being one of the poorest in Europe, remains richer than all in enthusiasm, love and the spirit of sacrifice – both old and young at the same time. This was especially humbling for us from Germany to witness, and I hope, encouraging, as it showed us it is the love for the Church that counts more for our work.

Some of the persons that are much involved in the rebuilding the Church life in Albania also participated in the Assembly, as organisers, as stewards or as speakers. Archbishop Anastasios, the head of this Church, who hosted the Assembly, was present almost all the time and his



Alexandra Popescu presents the Orthodox Youth Union in Germany to the General Assembly

being there was very valuable; he continually reminded the participants of the real task of Syndesmos which is to serve the Church, and so to serve God, to formulate and to try to find solutions for problems and crisis moments in our Church. I understood better than before how Syndesmos had done this in the past – by engaging itself and promoting mission, by speaking about the contradictions between the organisation of the 'Diaspora' and our ecclesiology, by promoting the dialogue with Oriental churches. Most of all, many ideas about how Syndesmos can continue to do this in the future emerged: engaging more in ecumenical dialogue; founding a mission centre; making plans for local cooperation and contacts; plans to organise conferences on specific subjects such as mission, the Council and liturgical language; the

decision to discontinue the membership (at least for a time) of organisations, which are not active in the life of Syndesmos and to accept new ones step by step. Some of these decisions are already reflected in the calendar of events of Syndesmos this and next year.

At this Assembly our organisation in Germany became an associated member of Syndesmos. For us this was very important, because even though some of us had been participating in Syndesmos events over the past few years without membership, and had good contacts with orthodox young people outside Germany, becoming members in Syndesmos has given us a stronger feeling of being and acting together with people with the same goal, and more experience and knowledge to reach it; not only the feeling, I think, but also more concrete perspectives of common work. It supports us to feel our problems in Germany – the isolation of national groups from each other, the relative inertia of these groups, the difficulty of gathering people and of convincing them to work for the whole Church, not only for their parish, and of doing, in general, anything that may help – are not only our problems, but are shared by others too, who nevertheless still continue their work. The Syndesmos membership brings us out of our 'province' – for, in spite of the one million or more Orthodox living in Germany, we are rather isolated one from another and from the world. I have not wanted to give an idealised image of this Assembly, but only to describe the aspects that impressed me most. It had perhaps also its failures, but I shall leave these for better-informed people to speak of. The only concern I would like to express here, is that such a successful assembly does not resemble a firework that brings joy for one night but achieves nothing stable – only beautiful speeches with no consequences. The most important thing is to apply the things that were said to our life in the Church, and to make Syndesmos once again a source of unity in Christ and of awareness of the gifts of God and of our responsibilities, and, finally, a true leaven for our Church and for the world.

As a newcomer, I had the impression that the Assembly gave many of us at least a good chance to advance on this way, and I felt all the enthusiasm of the beginning flooding into our organisation too. And as a new member, I felt that it is up to us too – with God's help – to make the Assembly bear the fruits it has promised.

Alexandra Popescu

DECISIONS OF THE XVII SYNDESMOS GENERAL ASSEMBLY Durres, Albania, 14-22 July 2003

New Syndesmos Board of Administration to serve in the period 2003 – 2007:

President:

- Christopher D'ALOISIO from *Belgium*

Vice-presidents:

- Spyros TSIMOURIS from *Greece*

- Cornelius GULERE WAMBI from *Uganda*

- Tony El SOURY from *Lebanon*

- Deacon Sami MITRI from *Egypt*

Members at large, regional representatives:

- Stephen KINYANJUI from *Kenya*: Africa region

- Pantelis KOSTOULAS from *U.S.A.*: Americas region

- Fr. Matthew BAMBANG from *Indonesia*: Asia region

- Marieta GANEVA from *Bulgaria*: Balkans region

- Magda MULARCZYK from *Poland*: Central Europe region

- Anna ROGOZHINA from *Russia*: Eastern Europe region

- Fr. Kurien DANIEL from *India*: Federated members

- Fadi ABOU MRAD from *Lebanon*: Middle East region

- Outi VASKO from *Finland*: Northern Europe region

- Nikos POLYZOS from *Greece*: Southern Europe region

- Cyrille SOLLOGOUB from *France*: Western Europe region



Welcome!

New member movements of "Syndesmos"

The XVII Syndesmos General Assembly accepted the following new members:

1. Orthodox Christian Fellowship OCA, USA. Status - Affiliated member
2. Orthodox Youth Union (Orthodoxe Jugend Bund OJB), Germany. Status - Associated member
3. St Savva Orthodox Youth Community SOYC of the Diocese of Banja Luka, Bosnia & Herzegovina. Status - Associated member
4. Youth Union of Jrvezh, Armenia. Status - Federated member

Other GA decisions on membership

After the detailed survey on the status, activities and involvement of members in Syndesmos produced by the General Secretariat within the first six-month period of 2003, all members were contacted and their involvement in the Fellowship was more clearly defined. The results of this survey were fruitful in the formulation of decisions by the former Board of Administration concerning the termination of membership status of current non-active members and of accepting new members, and in preparing the sessions on 'membership issues' of the General Assembly. As a result of the decisions taken at the last General Assembly, Syndesmos now makes up 121 member movements, the actual list of them can be found on Syndesmos website.

Another block of decisions of the General Assembly concerned the changed status of some member movements. An important decision was taken to clarify the membership status of Syndesmos member movements in Estonia. Both the Orthodox Fellowship of Orthodox Youth in Estonia and the Orthodox Youth League in Estonia were recognised as Affiliated members of Syndesmos.

Further details of these procedures will follow in the XVII Syndesmos General Assembly report.

Amendments to the Syndesmos Constitution

The General Assembly adopted a number of amendments to the Syndesmos Constitution. The formulation of the amendments will be reflected in the report of the General Assembly. The updated version of the Constitution is available on Syndesmos website.

«and you shall be My witnesses» (Acts 1:8)

XVII Syndesmos General Assembly, Albania, July 2003



Group photo of the Assembly participants



Keynote address of H. B. Archbishop Anastasios of Albania



A round-table discussion



*Acting president,
Hildo Bos,
reports to
the Assembly*



*Secretary General,
Rebecca Hookway
presents her report*

See more pictures on the pages 18 and 19...

Witnessing Christ

An account on the canonization of 5 saints of the 20th century

On the first weekend of May, in the Saint Alexander Nevsky Cathedral in Paris, five persons were proclaimed saints of the Church: Father Alexis Medvekov, a parish priest in Ugine (a small village in the French Alps) who fell asleep in 1934, Mother Mary Skobtsova, Father Dimitri Klepinin, George Skobtsov and Elijah Fondaminsky, who saved numerous Jews during the Nazi occupation of France, and subsequently perished in Nazi death camps.

The celebration was headed by his Eminence Archbishop Gabriel of Comana,

Exarch of the Ecumenical patriarch for the Russian Orthodox parishes of Western Europe. Several bishops from different jurisdictions were celebrating together the glorification Vigil and divine Liturgy. All the Orthodox bishops of France had invited the faithful to be present for this "canonisation of persons who have lived in West",

and to attend "this unique ecclesial event, which has a particular significance for the Orthodox Church in France". In fact, although all these five persons were born in Russia and emigrated in the twenties after the Bolshevik Revolution, they have lived the most important part of their lives in France – they witnessed the Gospel and suffered martyrdom in this country. They completely assumed the French reality and were involved in the tragedies that tore the world: they lived in Nazi barbarism. Thus, this canonisation of Orthodox saints in France, the first of its kind after the separation of 1054, can be seen as a recognition of a local Orthodox Church in France.

The canonisation is also an opportunity for us to think about the appeal to holiness,

which Jesus Christ Himself has given to all of us. It is an occasion to discover new ways, new paths to reach Christ's light.

An important aspect of canonisation is the pedagogical one: canonised saints become not only intercessors but also examples for the members of the Church. In the case of the newly canonised saints of France, this example is particularly vivid, thanks to their proximity to us in space and time. They were all in fact involved in the life of the diocese of Russian parishes of Western Europe, headed at that time by metropolitan Evlogy, in a great spirit of



Second from the left - George Skobtsov, fourth - Mother Mary (Skobtsov), sixth - Father Dimitri Klepinin.

wisdom and freedom. The four martyrs were members or close friends of the youth movement ACER (now ACER-MJO, one of the Syndesmos founding movements), taking part in its numerous activities (missionary work, congresses, youth camps, etc.). People from the older generation still alive today remember them even now. So they were all living and working in a society and a church context not so distant from today's. For these reasons, they give us a good example of holiness in our modern world and they constitute good intercessors for us with God's grace.

By looking briefly at the lives of the new glorified saints, let us draw on some aspects of this holiness in the modern world.

Father Alexis Medvekov's life was an example of humility, discretion and

abnegation. Born in 1867 in Russia, he was ordained to the priesthood in 1889 and assigned to a poor parish in a village sixty miles from Saint-Petersburg. When the revolution came, he was one of the first to be arrested and thrown into prison by the Bolsheviks for his steadfast faith. There, he was tortured yet miraculously released thanks to the intervention of his daughter. The entire family managed to escape in 1919 to Estonia, where, in order to feed the family, he was obliged to undertake exhausting work in a mine. In Estonia, his wife died in 1929 following a prolonged illness. He then made the request to

Metropolitan Evlogy to be permitted to join his diocese in France. He was thus appointed rector of a small parish in Ugine. His flock, mainly composed of workers from a local metallurgical factory, did not appreciate him, and criticised him, finding the services too long or his dress too poor.

The parish council appeared to be particularly

difficult, dominated by people from a military background, used to giving orders and interested more in politics than in Church. When criticised, he replied with humble silence and patience. He only reacted when he considered that the spirit of the Gospel had been infringed. Unfortunately, his health had been undermined by cancer of the intestine, and he died rapidly in 1943. Before his death, he called all his parishioners to his bedside – especially those who had once persecuted him – and asked forgiveness. He would probably have been forgotten if his body had not been found uncorrupted, on the occasion of the transfer of the old Ugine cemetery to another place in 1956.

The canonisation of this humble figure, a real model of contemporary priesthood, in a time in which humility is very often

confused with weakness and cowardice, should challenge each one of us.

Quite different is the way to holiness proposed by Mother Mary Skobtsova, Father Dimitri Klepinin, George Skobtsov and Elijah Fondaminsky, a group amongst which Mother Mary is the central figure. They were all members of the "Orthodox Action", founded by Mother Mary in 1935 with the blessing of Metropolitan Evlogy. This movement opened a house of hospitality based in a building in Paris, which hosted each day hundreds of persons in physical or mental distress, in order to offer them consolation, medical care and food. The work accomplished by Mother Mary and her co-workers was enormous, leaving little time for liturgical services and contemplation. This life, totally devoted to the "Sacrament of the Brother"* was an ideal way for Mother Mary to live a "renewed" monasticism, integrated in the city and in the world. As an exile in France, she was particularly aware of this opportunity offered to renew the Church. "What obligations follow from the gift of freedom which we have been granted? We are beyond the reach of persecution. We can write, speak, work, open schools ... At the same time, we have been liberated from age-old traditions ..." she wrote. From then, her main concern was to "not allow Christ to be overshadowed by any regulations, any customs, any traditions, any aesthetic considerations, or even any piety".

The crossed fate of Mother Mary and her companions, set during World War II, is very striking. Despite their very different backgrounds and family situations, they all felt the need to help during the occupation, at the risk of their life, and they subsequently all perished in Nazi camps.

Elijah Fondaminsky, an intellectual and an old friend and co-worker of Mother Mary, was the first to be arrested by the Gestapo,

because of his Jewish origin, and was sent to the prison camp in Compiègne. During his detention Elijah Fondaminsky came little by little to Christ, and decided to receive baptism in the camp. In order to share the fate of the Jews, he refused a project of escape prepared for him by his friends, and died at Auschwitz in 1943. Mother Mary, her son George, and Father Dimitri Klepinin, the chaplain of the house of hospitality, were arrested at the same time, in 1943, because the Gestapo discovered



Icon of the new saints by the iconographer Ivanka Dymyd.

that they were delivering baptismal certificates to Jews. During his interrogation, father Dimitri, who had two small children, made no attempt to hide his beliefs. Accused by an SS officer of helping the Jews, he responded by pointing to his pectoral cross, and asked: "Do you know this Jew?" He was then struck on the face and sent, with George Skobtsov, to the prison camp in Compiègne, where they managed to celebrate the Eucharist each day. They died both several months later when transferred to camps in Germany. During her two-year detention, Mother Mary assisted all her fellow prisoners to accept the cross, comforting them, giving away her last piece of bread, gathering them

for praying, reading them passages from the Gospel. She perished in the gas chamber in March 1945.

Of course, many aspects of the personality of Mother Mary and her companions were, and are still, criticised. For example Mother Mary and Elijah Fondaminsky were former members of the Social Revolutionary Party, and were even entangled in terrorist attempts. Mother Mary was married twice and had three children before becoming a

nun. She used to smoke and make late-night excursions to the cafés looking for the homeless. Above all, people were scandalised by her atypical monasticism, by the fact that she put more emphasis on hospitality than on liturgical services. It is clear that all these aspects, which, incidentally, make these persons much more living and close to us, are petty in comparison with what is essential in the figure of these saints: their sacrificial and self-giving love of the neighbour. This example is relevant to our contemporary world, of which the main disease is, according to Mother Mary's own words, selfishness. Mother Mary's life also offers an example of renewal in the Church, by proposing a new form of monasticism – not based on old structures, but in which the second commandment of the Gospel holds the main place – an unusual but still traditional form of monasticism, deeply rooted in the Gospel.

I would like to highlight the key figure of Metropolitan Evlogy: very open-minded, he generally supported the creative initiatives coming from lay people or clergy of his diocese. A man of prayer, full of discernment, he rapidly noticed Mother Mary's special vocation for social work. Instead of stopping her, he gave her the possibility to follow her calling and encouraged her to develop this new type of monasticism.

Cyrille Sollogoub

* This is the title of a collection of Mother Mary's writings in French published by Arjakovsky H.: *Le sacrament du frere, Le Sel de la Terre 1995, 2nd edition 2001.*

Holy Martyr Mary (Skobtsov) in our lives

The aim of the christian life is to baptise and sanctify all nations and the whole world. The duty of every Christian is to try to be a saint and help others to be one as well. The task is not an easy one, and the Holy Spirit acting in the Church of Christ helps us to understand how we can achieve our aim.

The canonisation of saints at all times in history has been a great help to Christians in their struggle to live according to Christ's commandments, in their yearning to save the world and themselves. We can pray to the saints and ask them for their intercessions; we can take their lives as an example and inspiration for our own life and we can also benefit from their advice.

When those saints are part of recent history, their influence on us tends to be stronger, because they are still living in the hearts and minds of their disciples, and of those who knew them; their advice and words and life are known to us through eyewitnesses and we feel a special closeness to them.

This is the case for Saint Nectarius of Aegina, Saint Silouan of Mount Athos and Saint John of Kronstadt. Now the Holy martyr Mary (Skobtsov) has "officially" joined those saints of the 20th century. Like most of the saints canonised in the Orthodox Church, Holy Martyr Mary was venerated and referred to as a Saint by the people of God years before the Church canonised her.

She was a strong character and led an untypical kind of monastic life in the world. She had found in the Gospel the priorities of her life (they can be summarised in Mat 22, 34-40¹), and implemented them even if sometimes they were not easily compatible with the quiet church life people were used to. There has therefore been some debate on whether she had gone too far away from what considered to be "Church tradition".

However with her canonisation, every member of the Orthodox Church has now received a confirmation that the path followed by Mother Mary was indeed the path that we are looking for and don't seem to find.

Thankfully for us, Mother Mary was a



Holy Martyr Mary of Paris

writer, so that we can take advice directly from her. In a remarkable essay, "Types of religious lives"², written in 1937, she describes several ways in which we can be misled and stop following Christ without realising it, taking as priorities things that have to remain secondary to Christ's commandments. She identifies at least four such paths of religious life, in all of which we can well recognise common mistakes of ours.

The first wrong path she warns us against is when the church is visible in the society mainly as part of a national culture, an institution more obviously linked to the state than to the Gospel, when its clergy becomes an elite that does not mix with the laity. If these tendencies (which, as Mother

Mary stated in 1937, cause an "intense atheism"³), can be summarized as nationalism, clericalism and compromise with political power, we will have to say that we recognise them well enough and would like to be cured of them.

A second dangerous path is ritualism, when the typikon and rubrics are prioritised above the News of the Gospel, above pastoral needs and care, when "instead of the living God, of Christ crucified and risen, we have (...) a new idol, a new form of paganism, which is manifested in arguments over calendars, rubrics, rules, prohibitions, when Sabbath triumphs over the Son of man". Here again, we have to recognise our own disease when we see that today the question of Old or New style in Divine worship seems much more important for us Orthodox than making sure the Gospel is read in Church in a language people can understand.

A third tendency which she describes – as true today as it was in the times of Mother Mary – is conservatism – the kind which blocks creativity. Very often it is rooted in a scholarly education in

academic fields related to church life, such as iconography, hymnography and theology. "For some, the comfortable piety of these custodians is a temporary lullaby, others will be repelled by it, leaving a great chasm between the Church and real life". We still see today, how the word "tradition" is used in reference to "what has been done in the Church for generations". In the name of this kind of "tradition", we are only allowed to and only want to do what we are used to, and we do not care about trying to adapt to the needs of the world. Forgetting that we are supposed to bring the world to Christ, we don't even feel the need (or we don't dare to) to be creative in the way we convey the Gospel to the world.

Asceticism, as a kind of spiritual

egocentrism, is the last type of religious life Mother Mary considers distracts us from our aim. In imitating the life of monastics, we tend to think a lot of the salvation of our own soul, and do not consider ourselves good enough to try and save other people. Out of humility, we pray and try to live in obedience, but we forget to truly love the neighbour; we consider love as merely "a kind of pious exercise" and part of our effort to save ourselves. We think, "How can I even think that I can give something to the world, I, who am nothing, stained by original sin, corrupted by personal vices and sins?", and therefore we do not do anything for the life of the world.

Fortunately, after pinpointing our mistakes, Holy Martyr Mary proposes us guidelines for a way of life, according to the Gospel, that has never stopped being present in the Church by the Holy Spirit. Following this way, we should always remember that Christ gave us two indissoluble commandments: to love God and to love our fellow man, and that all will come from this.

All the erroneous tendencies of our church lives listed above have as a common consequence a lack of care and love for our neighbour, and therefore for God. If we lived constantly with this commandment of love both for God and man, we would turn the world into church and we would baptise the world. There would be no more talk among us about the greatness of our

...The duty of every Christian is to try to be a saint and help others to be one as well...

national church, our "tradition", our inability to save the world, our "favourite liturgical language", old or new style. No

one would even think of jurisdictional quarels...

Holy Martyr Mary then goes further in saying that renunciation and self denial are the consequences of the commandment.

...Her example should help us to remember that if a person is shocking, unusual or innovating in the Church, this person is not necessarily outside the Church...

...Let us overcome sterile disputes over "modernism" and "ritualism", and recognise saints when we meet them...



Icon of Mother Mary by Heather MacKean.

We know that when she writes this, it is not just a matter of words. She herself went to the extreme end of self denial, she did give

herself totally to the poor, sick and lonely, and as a result of her love for mankind she freely walked to martyrdom.

So we can pray her to help us to follow her advice and take love for God and man as our first priority. We can also ask her to show us the path to a better witness of the church to the world. We know that she was a woman with weaknesses, that she sometimes was thought untypical or even shocking in her radical opinions, in her statement and behaviours. We also know that in being consistent with the priority of love, she found the way we are looking for. This helps us to carry on hoping that we will manage to find the path, despite our own weaknesses.

Her example should also help us to remember that if a person is shocking, unusual or innovating in the Church, this person is not necessarily outside the Church.

Nowadays there are people who serve the Church in a way that surprises or shocks us because it did not exist a few decades ago, and does not seem compatible with strict rules of national, clerical, ritual, aesthetic, or ascetic way of life. And yet, those "strange" people might be those whose example and teaching will be followed in the generations to come – these persons might be the saints of our church. In the time when Mother Mary lived, some people doubted she had found the right way, and did not take her seriously and criticized her. Let's try not to be blind, but let us recognise where true priorities lie.

Let us overcome sterile disputes over "modernism" and "ritualism", and recognise saints when we meet them.

Lydia Obolensky-D'Aloisio

1. "But when the Pharisees heard that He had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. Then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, and saying, 'Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said to him, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.'

2. The English translation of this text is to be found in: Sourozh, n°74, 75, 76 (1998-99). In Russian: Vestnik RHD, 176, N°2-3 (1997).

3. All quotations are Mother Mary's, from "Types of religious lives", taken from a book by Fr Michael Plekon, "Living Icons, persons of faith in the eastern Church", University of Notre Dame Press, Indiana: 2002

Reports from Syndesmos events 2004 Syndesmos Orthodox and Roman Catholic youth exchange

Monastery of Bose, Italy 5-13 June 2004

The Orthodox and Roman Catholic youth exchange last June was a milestone in the Syndesmos annual programme of events, being the first ecumenical programme organised by the fellowship for a long time – the first, that is, for more than five years to gather Orthodox and Roman Catholic participants in a single event focusing on Christian unity.



The participants of the exchange meet brother Enzo Bianchi, the prior of the Bose community

As we expected, the community of the Monastery of Bose – well known to a number of Syndesmos members through its hosting of a prominent annual International Conference of interest to the Orthodox world – were more than just our hosts, they became our friends. 25 young people from the Orthodox and Roman Catholic traditions from more than ten different countries were warmly looked after in an atmosphere wholly conducive to brotherly and open exchange. The programme included a few extremely fruitful interventions and discussions: sister Theoktisti (from the Orthodox monastery of St. John the Forerunner in Ayia, Greece) introduced the first round table discussion on Unity in Christ – the meaning of the Eucharist, in which she emphasized that disunity is the consequence of our sins, and that desire for unity is a gift from Christ, and is the desire of Christ for His Church. She stressed that being rooted in our own Tradition is what will allow us to enter into fruitful dialogue with other Christian families. Sister Theoktisti also opened the discussion on Monasticism – its impact on our lives and in the churches around the world, in which she outlined the developments of the monasticism traditions in the West and in the East.

We were also fortunate to be given an opportunity to meet and discuss with the Monastery's prior, Brother Enzo Bianchi – widely respected by Orthodox and Catholics alike for his



Session on Witnessing Jesus Christ



Singing evening

spiritual insight and writings – who in a spirit of love, openly answered questions prepared by participants. We were interested to hear from Brother Enzo of the history of the monastic community of Bose, which dates back to the late 1960s, when Brother Enzo and a small group of Christians first gathered in a shared life of prayer. One participant asked Brother Enzo whether he considered that, given the slow progress of the ecumenical dialogue, all our efforts for the unity of the Christians are in vain. In his answer, Brother Enzo remarked that three things would help the ecumenical dialogue to move forward: 1) if the Christian churches would refrain from making important decisions without first listening to each other; 2) if there was full recognition of the sacraments and ordained ministry between the Christian churches – at least, between those that have an Episcopal structure, and 3) if the Roman Catholic Church were to consider the Byzantine Catholic churches 'sister churches' in the true sense, and not 'daughter churches' – a problem which, he noted, causes great suffering in the Christian East.

Other interventions included one from Mr Dimitrios Kokkinos (of Akritas publications, Greece) – who reflected on the history of the division within the Church, the present situation and his hopes for the future, – and another from a panel made up of participants of different backgrounds, on the theme of Witnessing Jesus Christ Today in the Church and in the World.

Worship made up the backdrop of the seminar: on some days participants attended the morning and evening prayers of the community, whilst on other occasions they gathered for prayers following, alternately, the Orthodox and Catholic traditions. There was also the opportunity to celebrate the Orthodox liturgy and the Catholic Mass during the course of the programme.



The chapel in Bose, where the participants prayed each morning

The initiative for this event was taken at the XVII Syndesmos general assembly (Albania, July 2003) during which delegates confirmed their commitment to the ecumenical dialogue. Syndesmos is very grateful to the monastery of Bose for their generous hosting of this event and for the brotherly love, which they show towards Orthodox youth. We hope very much to be able to build on these relations in the future for the good of the Church.

Rebecca Hookway

"Towards the Council..." Urgent issues in the Church

Report from the 1st consultation Servagère-Malleval, France, 2-8 August 2004

Syndesmos, the World Fellowship of Orthodox Youth organised a consultation from 2nd to 8th August 2004 that gathered about 30 participants from 13 countries in ACER-MJO camp in Servagère-Malleval, France. The consultation was an enlarged board of administration meeting on urgent issues in the Church, with the title "Towards the Council".



Happy board after accomplishing the agenda

It was approved to hold the next analogous meetings on the following items:

- the unity of the Church and especially the canonical organisation of the so-called "diaspora";



Opening session

The participants shared their concerns about the witness of the Church in the world and agreed that conciliarity is needed at all Church levels before the opening of the Great and Holy Council.



Fr. Alexis Struve leading the discussion

- the theological and liturgical awareness of the people of God and their active participation in all aspects of Church life.

In addition to this, Syndesmos will advise its member movements to hold, on a local level, similar consultations "Towards the Council... Urgent issues in the Church" and coordinate the survey in order to provide the Church pastors, in a spirit of service, an expression of the conscience of Orthodox pleroma worldwide.

Syndesmos General Secretariat, 7th August 2004

"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity" (Psalm 132 [133], 1)

Diaconia Camps on Mount Athos and in St. John's the Forerunner convent in Agia

A world of love, prayer and obedience

After a 24-hour journey by train we arrived in Thessalonica. Our group consisted of 8 young people from Romania, members of the Romanian Christian Orthodox Students Association (ASCOR Iasi Branch), 5 girls who were heading to Saint John the Forerunner Monastery in Agia and three boys going to Mount Athos – the site of Syndesmos Diaconia Camp in 2004. We were carrying with us the stories from Patericon about Month Athos, wise elders, miracle working icons and holy relics. But also, we had the great desire to discover fellow Orthodox Christians coming from different orthodox countries to share, to meet, to pray and to praise God together. At the train station in Thessalonica we were exhausted from the trip, but perhaps happier than ever. After a city tour in the morning we had the chance to venerate the relics of Saint Dimitrios, the Patron Saint of Thessalonica and the Holy Relics of Saint Gregory Palamas. In the evening we met all participants: boys and girls coming from different parts of Europe and even beyond. We met our hosts: Fr. Ioannis Peristeridis, from the Holy Metropolis of Neapolis and Stavroupolis, Dimitris Oikonomou, the leader of the boys' team and former president of Syndesmos, the members of the present Syndesmos Board of Administration – Spyros Tsimouris, vice-president, and Nikos Polyzos, Southern Europe Regional Representative as well as Olga



Both groups meet in Thessalonica before heading to the monasteries

Oleinik, Syndesmos secretary general.

The next day we arrived at the site of the Diaconia Camp, the Monastery of Saint John the Forerunner and Holy Martyr Damian. And here, on top of the world, and isolated from it (at 1100 m), we discovered a wonderful world. A world of prayer, obedience and most importantly love.



Final evening in the St. John's convent

Our daily timetable was very organized: we participated in the church prayers (and the Paraklesis of the Theotokos was very impressive, unforgettable) and to do the same daily work as the sisters. So, everybody – the Romanian, Egyptian, English, Lithuanian and Russian participants – learned how to make Feta cheese, pack things, clean and feed the animals.

We had free time, of course. During free time, we sat and talked about us, about church life in our own countries. We visited the Hermitage of Saint Damian, the patron of the monastery, hieromonk and martyr from the 18th century. There we read the evening service in Romanian.

We became very close friends, so close that we couldn't believe we had to leave and be separated by such great distances, maybe forever. We became very close to the nuns also, and we want to say thousands of "thank yous" to all of them: Adelfi Theodecti, Adelfi Theoctisti, Adelfi Theoangheli, Adelfi Theodoxy, Adelfi Theofani, Adelfi Theology and to the novices. We experienced unbelievable feelings of friendship and sincere love. We came home with unforgettable memories in our hearts. We know that we may not meet again in this life, but we are sure that we can meet everyday in our prayers for one another.

Alina Nistor and Gabriela Pipirig

Philotheou means «God loving»

In the 6th of August 2004, 13 young men from seven different countries completed a remarkable journey – for nine days they participated in the monastic life of Holy Mount Athos. It was an excellent opportunity to get to know this unique spot of Orthodox spirituality closer. All this happened thanks to the World Fellowship of Orthodox Youth, Syndesmos, and the event it organised – the Diaconia Camp.

This year's pilgrimage, the eleventh of its kind, gathered representatives from Romania, South Korea, Russia, Congo, Egypt, Serbia, and Poland. Their guide, protector, and interpreter was Dimitri Oikonomou, former president of Syndesmos.

Each year the Syndesmos Diaconia Camp is organised in a new place (monastery or skete). This time the participants of the Camp were able to get acquainted with the hospitality of Philotheou monastery, which is highly regarded for its contribution to the spiritual development of Holy Mount Athos. This is the community from which blossomed seven saints of the Orthodox Church. Moreover in Philotheou, which means "God loving", the Jesus Prayer is tendered and developed.



Participants after a work day

One is reminded about this almost at each step because the monks pray this prayer not only in the silence of their cells but also aloud during their everyday monastic duties.

At the Syndesmos Diaconia Camp, opportunities are provided for young people to witness the reality of monastic life, to reap the spiritual benefits

flowing from it, as well as to understand the interrelations between prayer, work and the natural environment of the Athos Peninsula. For these reasons the event was not a simple trip, but a unique insight into a monastic everyday reality. The participants together with the monks, prayed, ate, took rest, celebrated feasts and worked.



View of the Philotheou Monastery in Mount Athos

The work of the monastery is organised on the basis of assigned tasks (so called diaconias), which one fulfils within a particular time. The main diaconia for this year's pilgrimage had participants cleaning a small lake at the foot of a waterfall, which had been partly buried with stones, rubble, and gravel, creating a dam. This had resulted from the use of explosives while building a road. In the case of heavy rain or melting snow, this dam presented the danger of a flood for the monastery. Apart from this job the pilgrimage participants helped the monks in the garden, kitchen and monastery refectory. The participants of Syndesmos Diaconia Camps spend their free time on excursions outside the monastery. This year there were three such opportunities, during which we visited the monasteries: Karakalou, Iveron, the Great Lavra, and Simonopetras.

The Holy Mount Athos is an amazing place. The Orthodox monastic life exists more than a thousand years, in spite of many more or less difficult periods. The spirituality, the history of Orthodoxy, tranquillity, and hospitality can be encountered at every step. These have been the themes of many books and essays, but nothing can replace the personal experience gained by a stay on Athos. We are grateful to Syndesmos for making this experience possible.

By Mariusz Nikiciuk

News from Syndesmos member movements

The General Assembly of FOY in Slovakia

The general assembly of the Fellowship of Orthodox Youth in Slovakia, took place on 23 November 2003 in Presov, where the new administration of the Fellowship was elected for the following 12-month period. At this meeting, the following officers were elected:

Vladimir Kuzan – **President**

Marian Koval – **Vice-President for Internal Affairs**

Maria Saganova – **Vice-President for Foreign Affairs**

Maria Saganova

Orthodox youth discusses the future of Europe

From 13th to 15th of February 2004 in Orthodox Seminary in Warsaw the conference of Syndesmos Central European member movements was held. The title of the meeting was "Contribution of youth and Orthodox Church into forming Christian basis of the New Europe". Apart from Poles in the conference participated representatives from Slovakia, Lithuania and Belarus. Rev. Jerzy Tofiluk – rector of Warsaw seminary, opened the meeting. He briefly presented the history and aims of that school. Rev. Jan



The participants of the Syndesmos Central Europe region meeting

Zozulak the dean of The Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Presov, Slovakia gave the next lecture on "Orthodox spirituality and its significance in united Europe". An important guest was Rose Thun – the chairperson of Polish Foundation of Robert Schuman. She widely spoke about European

Union attitude to religious and cultural traditions and about Schuman himself. Her speech was very optimistic, but she was conscious of differences between Schumann's idea and reality. In contrast, Nikolaj Bolokhovskiy from the Humanities University in Minsk saw a threat to traditional understanding of religion and God in the building process of European Union. In his opinion, it will cause increasing secularization of society.

Besides lectures and discussions there was also less formal but not less important part of the meeting. It was cultural evening and sightseeing Warsaw. Time spent this way let us break the barriers and build relationship which will positively influence future cooperation. Meeting was crowned with festive evening service – the all night vigil before the feast of Presentation of our Lord in the Temple celebrated by His Beatitude Metropolitan Sawa of Warsaw, the primate of the Orthodox Autocephalous Church in Poland.

Grzegorz Czyzewski

Youth Movement Established in Hungary

We would like to share with all of you our great joy that with the blessing of His Eminence Metropolitan Michael of Wien (Ecumenical Patriarchate) and Their Graces Bishop Hilarion of Wien and Budapest (Patriarchate of Russia), Bishop Lukian of Buda (Patriarchate of Serbia) and Bishop Sofronie of Gyula (Patriarchate of Romania)* the very first Orthodox Youth Movement of Hungary (MORISZ) was established on the 28th of

February in Budapest, Hungary. The goal of this organization is to bring together the Orthodox youth that are scattered among the various jurisdictions in different parts of Hungary. The programme has been comprised of the following activities: educational projects, services, organizing seminars and pilgrimages, cultural and sports events and camps. Hence, the purpose of the movement is to work in conjunction with other Orthodox youth organisations abroad, and to participate in the programmes of Syndesmos.

We would like to express our thanks to one of the international Orthodox groups who visited us in Winter 2002 and encouraged us with prayers, ideas, grand pieces of advice, and especially with their loving presence. Thus, with the brotherly love we had received in such encouragement and support from the start, we proceeded to embark on forming a youth fellowship in Hungary. We are especially grateful to the recently established Orthodox youth movement of Germany whose constitution we have used as a basis for our Hungarian Orthodox Youth Movement.



The youth of MORISZ

Contact persons of MORISZ:

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Budai Rita: riten@freestart.hu

Hungarian Children's Camp a Success

For the first time ever, an Orthodox children's camp took place in Hungary. The camp was organized by MORISZ. Some 35 children and young people from all over Hungary shared life for a week in a beautiful camp located in the middle of the Hungarian countryside. The programme included many activities among which were catechism and prayers lead by Fr Tibor Imrényi, walks, arts and crafts, an excursion to a wonderful stalagmite cave nearby, sport activities, and different folklore competitions. The evenings were illumined with engaging conversation and inspired fellowship and featured such experiences as sitting by the campfire, group singing with guitar accompaniment, and dancing.

After such a successful six-day camp session, we are looking forward and planning a ten-day camp and a long weekend family festival for 2005.

Irén Kaulics

* All these hierarchs have jurisdiction on Hungarian territory until the next Great Council of the Orthodox Church [note of the editor].

Written Theology – An Orthodox Exhibition in the Far East

Dostoyevsky once wrote, "Beauty will save the world". Many have thought about what this phrase might mean, but for one possible explanation it was not necessary to look any further than the exhibition "Written Theology" which took place in Hong Kong from Feb 22, 2004 – March 6, 2004.

For two weeks this winter, part of the Fringe Club (an arts center located in Central Hong Kong) was transformed into a space that was not of this world. Under the auspices of the Orthodox Metropolitanate of Hong Kong and Southeast Asia (OMHKSEA), the first-ever icon exhibition in Hong Kong was held on club premises and provided an opportunity for the greater Hong Kong community to be exposed to Orthodox Christianity in a very visible way. The reaction in the local press was enthusiastic and overwhelmingly supportive. The exhibit also had strong support from the local Christian

communities, with participation from the Anglican Archbishop, the Roman Catholic Bishop, and Representatives from the Hong Kong Christian Council, among many others. Over 8000 people availed themselves of the opportunity to see this exhibit, including many government officials.

For many in the greater Hong Kong area, this was their first exposure to Orthodox Christianity. Since the establishment of the OMHKSEA in 1996, and with the installment of Metropolitan Nikitas as hierarch in 1997, there has been a steadily growing Orthodox witness in the Hong Kong area. The icon exhibition was the latest component of that witness and was made possible in large part through the tireless efforts of Rev. Fr. Kostas Tsilis, the parish priest of the Cathedral in Hong Kong.

As the exhibition title implies, the focus of the exhibit dwelt on the rich theology inherent in Orthodox iconography. Icons from a number of iconographers representing different ethnic traditions adorned the walls. One section of the exhibit displayed iconography from native Asian iconographers and demonstrated how local ethnic elements can be incorporated in icons without changing the theology. Taken as a whole, the exhibit manifested the universal truth of the incarnation as proclaimed in icons and reminded us of the message of Christianity, which is salvation through Christ for all peoples. The clearest example of this was in an icon shown in the exhibit, which normally sits in the OMHKSEA offices, depicting Christ with the youth of India, Pakistan, and China.

Since the exhibit, there have been a number of visitors to services in the Orthodox Cathedral of St. Luke in Hong Kong. Clearly, the exhibit has begun to open the hearts and minds of those in Hong Kong to the fullness of the Christian faith that exists in the Orthodox Tradition. In response to public interest and requests from the Fringe Club, the OMHKSEA is already planning for the next icon exhibition to be held in late February 2005. Anyone who would like to help support this exhibition or other missionary work of the OMHKSEA is encouraged to contact the office at +852-2573-8328 (telephone) or office@antispam.omhksea.org .

Pantelis Kostoulas

Jubilee Youth Pilgrimage to Grabarka

This year, as every year for a long time now, Orthodox youth from the whole of Poland gathered on the Holy Mount Grabarka to spend time together and to pray together. This year it was the jubilee 25th Pilgrimage. As an honorary guest archbishop Jeremiasz of Wroclaw and Szczecin was invited, who is much loved among the youth. Many young people attended the pilgrimage, not only from Poland. This time we also had many guests from abroad - from Estonia, Russia, Lithuania, Belarus, Ukraine and Slovakia. Such a "mixture" made our pilgrimage more interesting and colourful.

Anna Krasowska

2004 Liturgical Institute at St Vladimir's Looks at the Future of Christian Marriage

Within the days - June 20-25, 2004 - St Vladimir's Seminary concluded its consecutive Liturgical Institute of Music and Pastoral Practice. The theme "Does Christian Marriage Have a Future?" provided a multi-faceted topic for the six-day forum, in which around seventy participants followed one of two tracks: pastoral practice or liturgical music.

Keynote guest speaker V Rev Dr John Breck, a pioneer in the field of Orthodox ethics, courageously engaged this complex theme in his keynote address. He spoke of the tremendous secularizing pressures thrown up against the Orthodox belief that true marriage is by definition "a monogamous, heterosexual, blessed, conjugal union." While we do not budge from this belief, he said, we must not approach those who challenge it with either fiery polemics or quiet resignation. Instead we are called to listen, love, educate, and witness to the saving purpose of marriage and chastity in our own lives.

These secularizing pressures--including same-sex unions, divorce,

cohabitation, and mixed and interfaith marriage--were taken up in greater specificity by seminary faculty leading the pastoral track. In particular, Dr Albert Rossi, Dr Peter Bouteneff, and Rev Dr Alexander Rentel gave presentations that placed these contemporary realities within the context of pastoral theology, dogmatic theology, psychology, and canon law. Their thoughtful, complimentary, presentations were fodder for interesting discussion when participants subsequently broke into small groups.

Throughout the week both priests and laypeople in the pastoral track were eager to speak of the many challenging scenarios they have met among their parish communities, friends, and family. While the institute faculty admitted that the Orthodox response to some of these contemporary issues is still being articulated, there is no doubt that everyone involved took away valuable insights.

Besides addressing cultural challenges to Christian marriage, the pastoral track also included sessions related to the personal vocation of being married. Rev

Timothy Blumentritt and Dr Rossi each gave talks on living the married life, while Rev Dr John Behr spoke on marriage and asceticism. The theology contained within the Orthodox wedding service was also brought to bear at various points during the week, specifically in Dr John Barnett's talk on New Testament readings in the Orthodox wedding service.

Participants in the liturgical music track were responsible for all the liturgical services during the institute, both reading and singing responses in two choirs. The climax of the week was the festal Vigil and Divine Liturgy celebrating the Nativity of St John the Baptist at which His Grace, Bishop Tikhon of South Canaan (OCA) presided. These services featured new music composed by institute faculty.

Held each year in June, the summer institute is a way for the seminary to serve the Orthodox Church across all jurisdictions. It allows many to take advantage of the seminary's resources and provides a forum for priests and laypeople to learn more about their faith and church practice through a week of worship, lectures, discussions, and activities.

Julia Mason Wickes

"Hodigitria" - The Common Way First International Orthodox Youth Festival

This event organized by youth departments of the Dioceses of Vitebsk (Belarus), Smolensk (Russia) and Saint Petersburg (Russia) with the help of ACOYM-All Church Orthodox Youth Movement (St. Petersburg)



Entering the city of Smolensk

gathered Orthodox youth from Belarus, Ukraine and Russia. This festival consisted of four parts and each of them had its special meaning. It started on 28th July, the feast of Saint Vladimir (15th July*), patron and enlightener of Russia, with the most unusual part - a bicycle pilgrimage from Kiev (Ukraine) via Vitebsk (Belarus) and Smolensk to the Holy Trinity- St Sergius Lavra (Russia). Pilgrims covered more than 1110 km giving "missionary concerts" and talks on their way and finished their pilgrimage on 14th August.



The participants of the summer institute at St. Vladimir's

The second part of this event took place at the Orthodox camp near Vitebsk and it was an International Youth Orthodox Festival of Orthodox songs. Participants (approximately 200 in number) spent four days in a beautiful campsite, with a wonderful lake at hand and woods around, in prayer, singing and talks. The contest itself began on 2nd August, the feast of Prophet Elijah (20th July*) and gathered 19 ensembles and 34 bards. On 4th August the festival participants made a pilgrimage trip to Polotsk to venerate the relics of Saint Ephrosynia of Polotsk. In the evening the gala-concert of the festival took place in Vitebsk. On 5th August, 150 festival participants went in procession with crosses and icons to the ancient city of Smolensk, to venerate the icon of Theotokos Hodigitria. On their way the participants made stops in the cities of Liozno, Rudnia, Galynki, village of Gniozdova to treat the local people with events in which Orthodox bards were involved.

On 9th August, the participants of the icon-bearing procession arrived at the Cathedral of the Holy Dormition in Smolensk, where they had a festal worship.

On 10th August, after the Liturgy within the framework of festal celebrations to venerate the icon of Our Lady of Smolensk (Hodigitria) the musicians gave a final concert of bard songs.

More than 50 representatives of Orthodox youth organizations from Russia, Belarus, Ukraine that participated in the festival and procession signed a proposal to set up an all-Slavonic youth organization and launch international projects for the youth. The organizing committee to set up the Slavonic Youth Union of St. Prince Alexey was elected.

Translated from Russian by Anna Rogozhina

* All feast dates are given according to Julian calendar, also called "old style".

The children summer camp of the orthodox youth in Germany (20th - 29th August)

For the 3rd time consecutively, the orthodox youth movement in Germany (OJB) organised a children camp for all orthodox children in Germany. This



At the divine liturgy

time the camp took place in a house in the forest, not far from the city of Fulda (Land Hessen, central Germany). 20 children of different nationalities (German, Romanian, Russian and Greek) between 9 and 14, 8 leaders (half of them between 15 and 18 years old) and one priest (father Peter Sonntag from Düsseldorf) participated in the camp. The children and leaders

came from Cologne, Düsseldorf, Nürnberg and Munich. Our aims in organizing such camps are to help strengthening the faith and church links of children and to help them to know each other in bringing them out of the ethnic isolation of their parishes. We hope that by these camps we will gather new engaged youth workers. This happens already – some of the children of the first camp have become leaders this year.



Fun time

Every day we had morning and evening prayers, catechesis and many games together. The catechesis was done in groups by the leaders. The subject of this year was 'The saints'. We chose some representative saints, between them some who are worshiped in the parts of the world we live in, such as St. Martin, St. Boniface (considered as the apostle of the Germans) and St. Mary from Paris, who died in a concentration camp in 1945 and was canonized recently. We tried to combine teaching with discussion, theatre,

games and inventing games (such as 'catechopoly', a quiz game about saints). Before evening prayer, there was reading from the Bible, with texts chosen and commented by children. Once we visited the cathedral of Fulda and the grave of St. Boniface. [We played many games such as treasure seeking in the forest; unfortunately, many of them had to happen indoors, as the weather was very wet and chilly. Besides, our organising and working capacities were severely put to the test: we had a lice attack, which meant hours of washing and cleaning – and for the children much unexpected fun.] The camp ended with a feast, where different comical sketches and songs were presented, and, of course, the final liturgy on Sunday morning before leaving. The liturgy, as well as all prayers, were held in German.

Even if – due perhaps to the late time of summer – not so many children as we had expected participated at this camp, we hope it has borne some fruit, that is, it has helped the children as much as the adults in strengthening the links between them and in encouraging them to live as orthodox Christians in Germany.

Alexandra Popescu

Orthodox Youth Movement of Antioch (MJO)

Other than the diocesan events planned and implemented during this year by each center of the orthodox Youth Movement of Antioch (MJO), the general secretariat's board of MJO has planned several events of which are the following:

1. A Symposium titled "Patrological Approaches - Stages from the thoughts of the fathers and the first ecclesiastical teachers" for the MJO members of different age spectrum was held in Swaida-Houran (Syria) from the 5th until the 11th September. Around 60 participants from several Antiochian dioceses attended this event that was patronized by Metropolitan Saba Isbir, Metropolitan of Bousra and Houran and Arab's Mountain who was present with them all along this event. It was presided by Dr. Assad Kattan (responsible for the Symposiums in the general secretariat's board).

Lectures about the following subjects were presented during this event:

- Opening Session: "Patrological Thoughts and the challenges of this era. Any Relation?" presented by Metropolitan Saba Isbir;
- "Presence of the patrological thoughts in the life of the Christians and in the Church. Actuality and Expectation" presented by Fr. Dr. George Attieh;

The programme also included daily contemplation in paragraphs from the scriptures on the development of the fatherhood in the Scriptures.

The discussion groups studied some texts on various topics from Origen, St. John Chrysostom, St. Maxim the confessor, and others.

The workshops topics were as follows:

- "Requirements of the historical reading";
- "Freedom in its Patrological and contemporaneous concepts".

2. Year of Costy Bandaly – Faith and the challenge of Novelty (the complete work)

The complete work of Dr. Costy Bandaly has been divided into six fields of subjects, for which a plan of lectures on these sides of Dr. Bandaly's thought is scheduled for the year 2005. Each of these lectures will probably be held twice (in Lebanon and perhaps in Syria). The lectures are divided as follows:

1. Faith and the Challenge of Philosophy;
2. Faith and the Challenge of Science;
3. Faith and the Challenge of the different Litterary Systems;
4. Faith and the Challenge of Education;
5. Faith and the Challenge of the Society;
6. Faith and the Challenge of Politics.

Tony El Soury

«and you shall be My witnesses» (Acts 1:8)

XVII Syndesmos General Assembly, Albania, July 2003



Members of the outgoing board



Debates in plenary



Former secretary general, Mark Stokoe, shares his experience of service in Syndesmos



Former President, Albert Laham, speaks on his vision of Syndesmos



Bible study led by fr. Luke Veronis



Presentation of the Orthodox Church in Albania



Albanian folk singers awaiting their presentation



Sharing across nations and generations

«and you shall be My witnesses» (Acts 1:8)

XVII Syndesmos General Assembly, Albania, July 2003



Great thanks to the Stewards!



Some stewards and participants



Voting can be fun!



Church service



Non-Chalcedonian liturgy



*Deacon Tigran Baghnyan (Armenia)
and fr. Job Getcha (France)*

SYNDESMOS

CALL FOR LOCAL CONSULTATIONS

with the title

"Towards the Council..." Urgent issues in the Church

The catholicity of the universal Church springs from the conciliarity of local church communities. Unfortunately, we have to admit that the gift of conciliarity is not actualised at present either in the context of the local Orthodox Churches or at the pan-Orthodox level.

At the same time there are a number of burning issues in the pan-Orthodox family, which remain unresolved after decades and form a heavy burden both for clergy and all the faithful.

Bearing these facts in mind Syndesmos Board of Administration decided to launch a 4-year programme of consultations on the theme "Towards the Council... Urgent issues in the Church." The first meeting of this kind took place 2-8 August 2004 in La Servagere (France).

Clearly understanding that this discussion should not be limited to the meetings of the Board, Syndesmos Board of Administration calls on Syndesmos member movements and all interested Orthodox youth and laity organisations to hold local consultations on the same theme.

These consultations do not have to be highly official, as there is a risk of them becoming a formality. They should be an expression of deep concerns of the people of God at the present moment. It is highly desired to have wherever possible both clergy and laity, as well as representatives of different age, sex, ethnic groups present during these consultations. Above all we call you to engage in the discussions with the spirit of creative daring and respect to the catholicity and truth abiding in the Body of Christ.

We also ask you to provide the Syndesmos General Secretariat with reports giving account on the results of these consultations. On the basis of these reports we will produce a synopsis of this precious discussion process for the use of the Church. We hope that this synopsis will be a valuable contribution for the preparation of the Great Council of the Orthodox Church.

Please, send the reports to:

Syndesmos General Secretariat

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E-mail: syndesmos@syndesmos.org

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